

EXHIBIT

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Alaska Head Start programs in limbo after regional office closed by U.S. Health Secretary Kennedy

The Seattle-based Region 10 office was one of five ordered closed last week, leaving uncertainty around program support for grant administration, compliance and future funding

By: [Carlane Smith](#) - April 9, 2025 5:00 am



Students swing on a playground at Meadow Lakes Head Start in Wasilla, Alaska. It closed in 2024 due to funding and staffing challenges. (Image by Lela Seiler, courtesy of CCS Early Learning)

Alaska Head Start programs are reeling after the regional federal office was suddenly closed last week, leaving programs uncertain about grant administration and future funding.

Trump-appointed U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. [ordered](#) the closure of five of the nation's 12 regional offices, as part of an agency-wide consolidation that included cutting 10,000 employees. That included closing the Seattle-based Region 10 office serving Alaska, Washington, Idaho, and Oregon.

The office was a critical resource for Alaska Head Start [programs](#), for grant administration and compliance, said Katrina Ahlfield, executive director for Kids' Corps Inc., an Anchorage Head Start program. She also serves on the board of the Alaska Head Start Association.

"Thousands of children and families potentially are impacted in the longer term," she said of the closures nationwide. "If this creates a delay in grant processing, or programs receiving the immediate support that they might need."

The federal department did not respond to a request for comment on Tuesday.

Head Start provides early learning programs through schools and nonprofits that serve children from low-income families, from supporting pregnant mothers up to age 5. Foster youth, families who receive supplemental assistance like food benefits, and those who are experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible.

"We're looking at some of the most vulnerable children and families in Alaska," Ahlfield said.

Ahlfield said Kids' Corps Inc. is one of four Head Start programs impacted directly, currently serving 1,076 children.

Ahlfield said the Alaska Head Start Association heard the news of the regional office closure on March 31 second-hand, and had no direct notice or further direction from federal officials.

That day, federal staff arrived to work in Seattle and were locked out, according to [news reports](#), and staff were placed on immediate administrative leave until June, without warning.

With that office closed, Ahlfield said there's a loss in administrative and technical support.

"They were your experts really on the Head Start performance standards and all of the compliance requirements that come along with operating any federal program," she said. "So they were kind of your go-to as a director, or go-to for technical assistance and questions. They also help to process your grant applications."

While there are no immediate cuts or closures, she said the loss of administrative support impacts her organization, as well as and also CCS Early Learning in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, Thirvalaska in Fairbanks, and the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc., or RurAL CAP, which serves children and families throughout Alaska.

Ahlfield said regional administrators would answer questions, or give advice related to health and safety requirements.

"These people had worked there for, you know, over 10 years, and really knew our programs well, and knew Alaska well," she said.

"So right now, we don't have anyone to contact about any of those kinds of questions or needs," she added.

Kids Corps Inc. serves 189 children in the Anchorage area, and Ahlfield said she's most concerned about their pending grant funding, which she expects to cover costs for the next six months.

"My most urgent concern is, is this going to create a delay in programs receiving grant approvals and funding on time in order to be able to continue providing services without a temporary, you know, delay and or needing to temporarily close?" she said.

She said there have not been Head Start funding delays reported in Alaska yet. But the uncertainty is difficult; any program cuts or closures would hit families and staff hard.

"We have an early-childhood and an educator crisis, where we don't have enough people in the field already," she said. "And so it just makes the situation worse for people. It definitely has the potential to create hard times."

Alaska Head Start receives \$68 million in federal funding each year, she said, with a 20% match totaling \$13 million provided by the state through the Alaska Department of Early Education and Childhood Development. DEED provides state grants to 17 Head Start programs across the state, in classroom and home-based settings.

DEED did not respond to requests for comment on Monday.

Ahlfield said Head Start administrators and communities are calling on the Alaska congressional delegation to urge the Trump administration to reverse the cuts, or provide a clear plan.

"If it's not possible to reinstate our regional office, and that would be our first preference, ... then we really need and want a well communicated, coordinated plan on how this is going to work, so that it doesn't impact these vital services," she said.

Correction: The name of Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc., or RurAL CAP, has been corrected.

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